

generations, are being denied the opportunity to live to their fullest potential because they were denied the opportunity of a college education.

This year, the Education and Labor Committee is leading legislation that will significantly improve access to college with improved Pell Grants and cuts in student loans.

So, Mr. Speaker, education affects many issues that we deal with: economic competitiveness, crime and welfare. And so I'd like to thank the gentlelady from Michigan, the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, Ms. KILPATRICK, for organizing the effort to focus on education tonight.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. GARRETT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

THE TRUE GOAL OF OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. described the end result of education as a person having the ability to think intensively and critically. He embraced the idea that intelligence plus character should be the true goal of our education system. This truly is the goal that we must strive and work towards.

Helping our children to think is crucial; however, the blocks to build to that point are difficult to create. It takes support, resources, confidence and opportunity, but most importantly, these pieces must be available for each individual no matter who or where they come from.

Today we find our public school systems throughout America in many places in disarray, underfunded, overpopulated, and, in many districts, underattended. As a Nation, we have moved forward, and then there are times when it looks as though we're doing the Watusi, that is, two steps forward, and two steps back.

I can remember a time when, in almost any community that you went, people realized and recognized that education was the absolute key to progress.

According to the Abecedarian study, the importance of early childhood education is critical. The report shows that children who receive a formal early childhood education overwhelmingly do better in school.

Unfortunately, 55 percent of children whose families are below the poverty line do not receive a formal early childhood education. An overwhelming number of these children, whose mothers are unemployed, do not have access

to early childhood education. These numbers are astonishing, especially given what we already know.

We are engaged in competitiveness, not just in communities and neighborhoods or States, but from a global perspective, and unless children get an early beginning, they find themselves continuously behind and finding it difficult to catch up.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, one of the areas that I have a tremendous amount of concern about is the fact that African American males are graduating from high school at a rate of less than 50 percent. As a matter of fact, many of them drop out as early as third or fourth grade.

And it's my contention that they drop out because, for many of them, they have never seen a male figure with a book in his hand. They've never had a male teacher who looked like them. They've never seen a male at home with a book. And so they contend that education is a female or woman or girl kind of thing.

And we must find ways to get more male teachers in the classroom, more male teachers involved in Head Start. And we must get communities totally engaged and totally involved, so that as children grow up, they will know that education has been and will continue to be the great equalizer, and without it they don't have a chance.

So I thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Congressional Black Caucus, our chairman, Representative KILPATRICK, for setting aside this time to address education issues, especially affecting African American communities.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURTON of Indiana addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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INEQUITIES IN EDUCATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, today we members of the Congressional Black Caucus, under the leadership of our chairwoman, CAROLYN CHEEKS KILPATRICK, are taking time to commemorate Juneteenth and reflect on this historical event in 1865 when the news of their emancipation was finally received by 250,000 enslaved in Texas, 2 years late. And as we do so, it seems appropriate that we reflect on the inequities that continue to plague the African American community, the remedies for which are also too late.

And so, as we take the floor of the seat of government in our country, we say the time is now. Again, better later

than never for this 110th Congress to bring another message of freedom to African Americans, freedom from economic blight, from lack of access to quality and comprehensive health care, from substandard housing, and from the issue that is the subject of our discussion tonight: rundown, poorly equipped, and understaffed schools and the overall inequities in our Nation's educational system.

June also marks the celebration of graduation season across the Nation. And as we cheer millions of high school graduates, we must not forget the 1.2 million students who left school this year without a high school diploma.

Dropouts are twice as likely to be unemployed. Even those who work, for those who work the pay is low. Opportunity for advancement is limited, and health insurance is essentially unavailable.

This is a particular problem in communities of color. For African Americans and Latinos, the dropout rate approaches an astonishing and alarming 50 percent and affects all communities, large or small, rural or urban, including our territories. This high rate of high school dropout and the consequent unemployment disproportionately affect African American males. According to the last U.S. Census, the fraction of black men with a high school education or less is about 50 percent, nearly half of the black male population.

A report published by the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation last year indicated that the employment for what they call less educated black men has been in decline during the last decade, and this, despite the fact that opportunities exist to reverse this because of discrimination in hiring.

The racial difference in the labor force participation rates are sharpest for those without a high school degree. Only half of prime-age black men without a high school degree are in the labor force.

Mr. Speaker, education is everyone's issue. However, the current administration seems to have an opposing view as they propose to completely cut funding for the Dropout Prevention Program. The Youth Activities Program, under their fiscal year 2008 budget proposal, would lose \$100 million of funding compared to 2006, and Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities grant program would almost be cut by \$150 million. This funding needs to be restored. These programs are part of the solution to the dropout problem.

So we in the Congressional Black Caucus are issuing a call to action across our Nation to reduce the dropout rate and raise the graduation rate above its current level of 70 percent. Keeping our people in improved schools must be a part of the debate and be addressed as we move to reauthorize and fund an amended and improved No Child Left Behind.

Today the Campaign for High School Equity met on the Hill to address and